The Narration of Roles in Foreign Policy Analysis

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Starting from the recurrent criticism that role theory is conceptually rich but methodologically poor, this article assesses the potential of interpretive narrative analysis for the methodological development of role theory within foreign policy analysis. It focuses on the methodological side of narratives from an interpretive perspective, so as to detect role conceptions and role change. The symbolic-interactionist role theory framework is already set up to incorporate the elements of *doing* interpretive narrative analysis from this perspective, because, as Herbert Mead (1932) argued, agents constantly reinterpret their past as they face an emergent present. This is akin to Mark Bevir and Rod Rhodes' (2003) interpretive notions of 'traditions' and 'dilemmas'. The potential of narratives is demonstrated by focusing specifically on ruling narrations as advanced by then President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela (1999–2013), to conceive and cement a new role as a revolutionary state.

Keywords: role theory, role conception, role change, interpretive narrative analysis, ruling narratives, revolutionary role

Introduction

Symbolic-interactionist role theory has recently received scholarly attention as a theoretical approach that has the necessary conceptual apparatus to understand foreign policy decision-making dynamics, the actors involved in them and the relationship between nation states. Understanding foreign policy decisions and the relationship between states in terms of cooperation and conflict is based on the recognition of states' respective roles within the international system (Walker 2017: 2). Roles, defined as social positions within a group and the type of people that it is possible to be, are socially constructed by ego's own conception and by alter's expectations (Stryker and Statham 1985: 323; see also, Thies 2010; Harnisch 2011). While the role theory research agenda has gone in different directions – such as domestic role contestation, state socialisation, expectations from others and leaders as role holders – all these works in foreign policy analysis (FPA) nevertheless do not spend enough time in developing the methodological side of role theory.

One of the reasons for the lack of attention given to the methodological side of role theory is the focus instead on expanding its theoretical scope and value. In fact, role theory works have not used up much ink in discussing how to do role theory research in practice – namely by using different types of methodologies and methods.[1] Therefore, Stephen Walker's (1987: 2) assertion that role theory is conceptually rich but methodologically poor still remains valid (see also, Walker 2017). Thies (2014: 9) reaffirms the validity of this claim when he states that 'role theorists have yet to produce a handbook on methodology' for analysing national role conceptions (NRCs).

This article examines, then, the potential of interpretive narrative analysis to further the methodological development of role theory. What follows touches upon only one possibility among many – such as process tracing, discourse analysis, content analysis and historical

analysis – to which interpretive narrative analysis is also sympathetic. This study focuses on ruling narratives as a process by which foreign policy elites cast a narration, or a set of them – which are roles devised with the purpose of understanding their present and setting blueprints for their future. In this quest to understand their present, actors rely on a constant reinterpretation of their past as they confront dilemmas that challenge existing traditions. Ruling narratives are thus the theories, beliefs and stories that actors in decision-making positions employ to frame their world, and also to better comprehend where they stand in relation to other international actors (Bevir, Daddow and Hall 2013a).

This article also has theoretical and empirical ambitions, despite its focus being on the interpretive narrative analysis method from and within a symbolic-interactionist role theory perspective. One reason for having a theoretical ambition is that the interpretive narrative method needs to be grounded in a theorisation about what can be gained by deepening the link between role theory and interpretivism, following the works of Bevir and Rhodes (2003, 2010). The answer to this challenge lies in the work of the founding father of symbolic interactionism; that is, Mead's notion of 'past and future' (see Mead 1963–1964). While ruling narratives are the set of theories, stories and beliefs advanced by the main actors of a narration, interpretive narrative analysis is the overall technique by which to gather data and interpret those ruling narratives – doing so by following a corresponding methodology, interpretivism (Jackson 2011: 25; McCourt 2014). Conversely, the empirical ambition of this article is to show, first, how to conduct interpretive narrative analysis by focusing exclusively on ruling narrations of foreign policy elites and leaders, and, second, to interpret how roles are conceived and undergo change as part of those ruling narratives.

Therefore, the main arguments advanced in this article are that symbolic-interactionist role theory is interpretive, and that such an interpretive orientation lies in how ruling narrators conceive, reinterpret and change stories of the past to make sense of their observable present

(inter-subjective) – as well as to cast a future. In the notion of past and future of Mead, what it is at stake is how ruling narrators in their present time reinterpret their past to confront the socially self-created or externally triggered dilemmas that challenge a particular role in foreign policy. In other words, Bevir and Rhodes interpretivist notions meet Mead's one of temporality. In addition, the article also claims that as new roles are being conceived (role conception) through a subjective reinterpretation of the past, another role or set of them is simultaneously experiencing accommodation and change.

The study of role conception and role change is undertaken through the case study specifically of Venezuela under Hugo Chávez (1999–2013). The focus herein is on the ruling narrative(s) advanced by Venezuela's leader and its foreign policy elite, and how they tend to manipulate the cultural repertoire of the country to sediment a new role as a revolutionary state. Venezuela is a case that allow us to focus on two processes of change. First, Venezuela is useful to show how a role – revolutionary – has evolved over time and how it is played differently from by other actors holding such a role in the past. Second, Venezuela is a case of role change – from an internationalist and partner role of the United States to that of a revolutionary state. Moreover, as Chávez implemented reforms to reduce the influence of the domestic political opposition he did not experience severe constraints to advancing a revolutionary role.[2] The case also provides certain analytical advantages too, as it has a salient ruling narrator and salient antagonists – which allow us to incorporate in a rather preliminary way some of the basic elements of interpretive narrative analysis into the role theory framework. Thus, the case selection is driven ultimately by the rationale of illustration.

The remaining parts of this article proceed as follows: As the theoretical and conceptual developments of role theory have already been documented thoroughly in recent works (see Thies 2010; Harnisch et al. 2011), only a brief account of symbolic-interactionist role theory is presented in the next section. This section also shows the lack of attention paid in the existing literature to the

methodological side of role theory. Before coming back to the methodological aspects outlined in the literature review, this section also introduces the theoretical notions of 'agency' and 'change' as key aspects of symbolic interactionism vis-à-vis more structural-functional approaches to role theory. Then, Bevir's interpretive theory approach and its links to roles and ruling narratives are discussed – especially as related to the concepts of past, present and future of Mead. Following that theoretical discussion, the elements of interpretive narrative analysis as method are developed. Following on, Venezuela's foreign policy as a revolutionary state under Hugo Chávez is analysed as an illustrative case. This section outlines the basic elements with which to conduct narrative analysis such as main events, locations, actors, times and points of view of the narration, which are used as yardsticks to sketch out the main parts of the ruling narration.[3] After outlining the basic elements of a narrative analysis, the full narration of Venezuela's NRC as a revolutionary state then follows – wherein the domestic contestation of its role and of international interactions with other states are analysed.[4] Finally, the article concludes with an assessment of the use of interpretive narrative analysis as a viable method for advancing role theory.

Symbolic-interactionist Role Theory

State of the Art and Concepts

Symbolic-interactionist role theory has blossomed in recent years within foreign policy analysis.[5] The most recent works on role theory have mainly been limited to its theoretical development within the field of FPA (see Harnisch et al. 2011; Cantir and Kaarbo 2012; McCourt 2012; Wehner and Thies 2014). Recently, empirical applications have mainly focused on the domestic contestation of roles (Kaarbo and Cantir 2013; Brummer and Thies 2015;

Wehner and Thies 2014), while others have concentrated more on the international level in terms of how states socialise each other (Thies 2013) or how a state is at a stage of pre-socialisation before sovereignty is achieved – like the case of the Scottish referendum shows (Beasley and Kaarbo 2017). Others have assessed the different phases of British foreign policy (McCourt 2014), or have assessed the reasons why the UK got involved in the Falklands Conflict in 1982 (McCourt 2011). Further, others have focused on the importance of personal leadership to explain whether it is personal beliefs or roles that predominate in a state's foreign policy making (see Cudahar et al. 2017).

Nevertheless, the proponents of symbolic-interactionist role theory have focused more on theoretically elaborating its framework than on demonstrating its methodological strength (see Harnisch 2011; McCourt 2012). Kaarbo and Cantir (2013) use process tracing for this, whereas McCourt (2011) relies on a mixture of discourse and rhetorical analysis. Others have conducted historical and content-based analysis (see Aggestam 2004; Harnisch et al. 2011; Thies 2012). Yet, these elaborations are only rather brief. An exception is McCourt (2014), who conducts an historical analysis and uses an interpretative approach like those used in History. Although this work uses historical analysis and the interpretivist approach of this discipline, the elements of interpretive narrative analysis remain unarticulated in the empirical analysis. Similarly, Beneš and Harnisch (2015) refer to the temporal dimension by using the notion of an historical self – but they do not further elaborate on the methodological side of this, nor on the subjective meaning of the past in the present making of a new self. Likewise, Wehner and Thies (2014) have shown the potential of narrative analysis for role theory development from the interpretive perspective developed by Bevir and others (see Bevir and Rhodes 2002, 2003, 2006, 2010; Bevir et al. 2013a, 2013b). These two authors do not explicitly explore the various elements used to detect and rebuild a narration, which are events, times, actors, locations and points of view (see Bal 1997). However they do reveal that symbolic-interactionist role theory is already fine-tuned for the use of

narrative analysis from within an interpretive framework, a position from which this article here builds. It also goes a step further by bringing in Mead's notion of past and future, as well as by bringing to the fore the different basic elements of undertaking interpretive narrative analysis in the empirical section.

Nonetheless, all of the abovementioned role theory works and applications have shown the benefits of role theory in FPA, as role theory has a descriptive, analytical and organisational value (Walker 1987: 2). The descriptive value of role theory is based on its rich conceptual vocabulary, while its organisational value lies in its ability to not only cross different levels of analysis (people, state and system) but also to bridge them. Finally, role theory's explanatory value derives from its capacity to adapt and be incorporated into other theoretical approaches (Thies 2010: 1; Walker 1987: 2). For instance, this article brings interpretive notions and their methodological steps into role theory; that is its explanatory value. In addition, the empirical analysis not only concentrates on the figure of the personal leader (Hugo Chávez), but it also brings together the domestic and international levels – as roles are also cast domestically and internationally; that is its organisational value. Finally, the article relies on part of the conceptual apparatus of role theory; that is its descriptive value.

In terms of its descriptive value, a role conception involves the ego's own perception of its social position vis-à-vis the position(s) and expectations of others (Kirste and Maull 1996: 289). Consequently, role expectations are created by the demands of others that the actor in question performs certain functions and/or assumes certain responsibilities in a social system or within the organised group. These expectations can be implicit or explicit, and they can take the form of social cues or direct socialisation exerted by significant others (see Harnisch 2011; Thies 2013). Role location is the process by which an actor situates a suitable role within a social structure (Thies 2012: 29), and it is where the observable interaction between ego and alter takes place. In addition, role performance is the actual behaviour of actors 'in terms of characteristic patterns

of decisions and actions undertaken in specific situational contexts' (Aggestam 2006: 20). Other concepts that are helpful to describe the social reality of actors are 'role set' and 'role change'. The former refers to the number of roles that an actor possesses in their social life (Aggestam 2006), whereas the latter is used to describe processes of adjustment or adaptation of a role over time as much as its potential total dismissal from an actor's role set.

Creativity and Change in Role Theory

Role theory gives agency to actors despite the structural constraints that they experience. Actors are able to innovate in the scripts that they follow and to improvise on how to play a role according to the situation that they face, according to the type of actor that they are and according to the expectations communicated by others. In this sense, symbolic-interactionist role theory is different from structural-functional approaches as advanced by sociologist Talcott Parsons (1951). He saw roles as reproducing mere social functions that are determined by a social structure. In fact, a structural over determinism perspective and an exclusive focus on NRCs were key characteristics of the early works on foreign policy role theory (see Holsti 1970; Le Pestre 1997; Wish 1980). Although all the mentioned works are seminal contributions, they lack the agential dynamic of the self (ego) and the incorporation of an active other (alter) into the process of role conception (see Breuning 2011; McCourt 2014; Wehner and Thies 2014).

Moreover, the agential power of both parties involved in the interaction shows that actors can develop patterns or structures that shape social processes – and the roles that they play. It also gives these social actors the ability to change those patterns, as structures are social and thus do not determine actors' behaviour. However, structures still explain part of the role relationship. In combination with agency, structures can help to explain why actors take on a certain role over other ones. The choice to enact (or not) a specific role is also limited by an

actor's material capabilities (McCourt 2012: 381; Thies 2012: 29). Structures, therefore, emerge from this interaction and frame the subsequent role relationships, though they do not determine actors' actual role behaviour.

Agency in role theory entails creativity, which enables innovation with regards to the roles and counter-roles that actors enact; it also provides an understanding of the eventual evolution of a role relationship, including its main traits and particularities. At the heart of agency is the notion of role change, which spans from a small adaptation in the way that the role is being played to its outright total dismiss and the enactment of an entirely new, different role. As such, a role relationship (e.g. leader/follower or lender/borrower) may change over time in terms of how such roles are enacted. The name of the role (i.e. 'leader' or 'follower') gives general characteristics to role relationships in terms of patterns of expected behaviour. However, the manifestations of a role also demonstrate particularities that stem both from what the type of actors' ego and alter are and from their respective cultural repertoires (subjective past), as attitudes and actions need to both resonate with the domestic audience and be accepted by international others. Thus the agency of an actor is also based on how ego reinterprets its past to make sense of current challenges in foreign policy, as well as to frame possible courses of actions in future.

The Interpretive Framework in Role Theory

The role theory framework has thus far incorporated two aspects of the interpretive approach developed by Bevir and Rhodes (2003, 2006): traditions and dilemmas. These are key to understanding how the role of a certain actor came about, when the role was taken up and at

which moments in time the role experienced change. Thus, roles can be studied at the point of interplay between particular foreign policy traditions and dilemmas (Wehner and Thies 2014).

A foreign policy tradition is a set of theories and narratives inherited by those in power that helps them set the backdrop for their subsequent agency. A tradition is the context in which humans develop and adopt beliefs and then perform actions (see Bevir and Rhodes 2002). However, foreign policy traditions are not fixed in time or space; they instead evolve due to actors' either conscious or unconscious use of creativity in addressing pressing foreign policy dilemmas. Therefore a tradition and its change over time need to be assessed in light of existing dilemmas, which challenge an actor's set of beliefs and, in turn, the tradition itself (Wehner and Thies 2014).

A foreign policy dilemma thus constitutes unusual or new circumstances that cannot be explained by the tradition, and that force foreign policy actors to innovate in order to make sense of this novel situation. At the same time, how actors confront the dilemma at hand is key to understanding any changes in a tradition – and thus also in roles within a given social context (Wehner and Thies 2014). Therefore, the foreign policy dilemma forces actors to reconsider and accommodate the new circumstances that they are confronted with (Bevir and Rhodes 2002). Foreign policy actors do this by telling new stories that allow them to tweak the existing foreign policy tradition, sometimes unaware that they are creating change – as actors rely ultimately on their own set of beliefs, which are grounded in what they know as traditions (Bevir, Daddow and Hall 2013a). In other words, new stories are new attempts to unfold new ruling narratives, so as to frame the novel situation with which actors are now confronted.

However changes in the ruling narrative and in the roles enacted are never absolute, as they never involve a clean break with the past. Instead, actors tend to refer selectively to other parts of their existing cultural and historical repertoire to construct new narrations and to justify the process of role change. Reference to the past is key for any new ruling narrative or foreign

policy actor that wants to gain both domestic and international acceptance. Beneš and Harnisch (2015) claim that role relationships are not only defined spatially on both sides but also unfold within a specific historical context. Roles are cast both domestically and internationally; as such, they are simultaneous processes. Domestically, actors refer to their (historical) cultural repertoire via narrations from the present time (Ringmar 1996). As Beneš and Harnisch (2015) stress, roles are formed via historical identification with 'significant others' or 'generalised others' – a process in which the historical self can actually play the role of significant other. A general other is in this case the social system in which an actor locates a role by anticipating what the most appropriate expected behaviour is. A general other is the demands of the social system, whereas a significant other is a primary socialising agent for ego. The constitution of a significant other is often based on the past experiences of the role holder, like parents and children or like a state high up in a social hierarchy vis-à-vis a novice state (Harnisch 2011: 11–12; Thies 2013).

Bevir and Rhodes (2003) talk about change as a ubiquitous process, as actors refer to existing traditions in order to comprehend and react to the pressing dilemma. Bevir et al. (2013: 167) also refer to how a dilemma captures the process by which foreign policy elites modify their tradition via narrations and the reinterpretation of their existing inheritance. Novelty lies in that interpretation and reinterpretation of past events, and in how those events are given cohesion by ruling narrators in order to make sense of a present by stretching the cultural repertoire of a nation further. This process is far from being a homogenous one, as all political activities are always contingent and thus contested – meaning role contestation. However foreign policy actors or ruling narrators react to dilemmas by referring to their tradition, or alternatively to selected aspects of it. Yet, not all ruling narratives are always credible both

domestically and internationally. So there are limits to how much a ruling narrator can set a new role without taking into consideration the available aspects of the historically contingent past, in order to ground that role in the present.

While Bevir and Rhodes (2003) use the notions of traditions and dilemmas, Mead (1932) refers to the past as a subjective recreation of events from an inter-subjective present (a relational and social one). Thus, ontological reality for Mead is in the present time – in which observable role interactions take place (Simpson 2014: 8−9). For Mead, the present as a temporal dimension is a turning point or a passageway to a new present. In other words, an event is a passage of actions or observable events in an evolving present – as the past is being retold via narrations. These narrations are important to the emergence of a new and different past, so as to underpin the emergence of an anticipated future. In this emergent present is where past, present and future time overlap, co-exist and interlock. These different time dimensions unfold within narrations of agents who cast and recast the past to face the emergent present and to build a different future. This simultaneous co-existence of phases of time is what Mead calls 'sociality', which is the constant movement from past to future – unfolding in the emergent present (Mead 1932: 73–75). These reconstructions of subjective time dimensions (past–future) are interpretive processes by agents who, in telling new stories of the past, make novelty emerge, and thus change becomes possible. Agency is also at the heart of each new story about the past, to make sense of the present time passage. Creativity and thus change in all its possible variants – from the adjustment of a role regarding how it is conceived and played to its complete dismissal from an actor's role set – become manifestly visible and observable.

In a way the emergent present is where action takes place, and thus can be observed and theorised as a social interaction – but in that social interaction actors tend to use historical

repertoires to portray who they are.[6] Role changes are never absolute ones, as actors advance roles that are grounded historically via narratives to explain their social interaction in the emergent present with a general and/or significant other. The present is where actions take place and where they can be observed or interpreted, but from that present a subjective past and subjective future unfold as new stories are told by the relevant agents.

There are similarities between the interpretive approach of Bevir and Rhodes (2003, 2006) and Mead's notions of past, present, future. Traditions and dilemmas are similar to the notion of an emergent present as a novel situation – that is, a dilemma – while the notion of the past being constantly reinterpreted to make sense of an emergent present in Mead's sense is Bevir's own understanding of a tradition. In both approaches change is induced by agents who reinterpret or remake the past via ruling narrations to confront the novel situation and to project a particular future. Moreover, change is ubiquitous – as actors confront passages or dilemmas within that narration of a tradition or past time. In other words, Bevir's interpretative approach meets Mead's notion of sociality for a further development of the role theory framework in FPA.

In Mead's sociality there is an interpretivist notion of how actors behave based on role interactions, but at the same time how actors need to make sense of their role conceptions and role change in line with the available cultural repertoire(s). Put differently, symbolic interactionism – and thus role theory – is interpretive by nature inasmuch as interpretation is always symbolic (cf. Denzin 1990: 111). If interpretation is indeed always symbolic, then symbolic-interactionist role theory should be akin to incorporating aspects of the interpretive tradition – such as dilemmas and traditions. These are told in ruling narratives, inasmuch as Mead (1932) refers to

past and future dimensions as being subject to constant reinterpretations by agents located in an emergent present.

In sum, ruling narratives are key for the analysis of foreign policy as they capture the dynamics of elites when they confront the external expectations of others. However, the interpretive approach as imported by role theory has not fully developed the connection between the theoretical side (understanding interpretive narratives and the temporal dimensions of Mead) and the practical one (carrying out interpretive narrative analysis and reconstructing a narration in role theory) as of yet. Developing this link is key to fully understanding the analytical advantages of the interpretive narrative method, and also to providing an alternative to role theory development.

Narrative Analysis in Role Theory

Dilemmas can challenge the existing ruling narrative, and as such they generate turning points (see Denzin 1989). In the language of Mead (1932), a turning point is an emergent present. Focusing on these turning points is a way to detect how political elites and leaders react to novel foreign policy circumstances, as it is they who are the ones advancing ruling narrations. In fact, these turning points may involve telling new stories or incorporating new interpretations into an existing narration to make sense of the new events. Interpretive narrative analysis is an appropriate method for symbolic-interactionist role theory, as it enables researchers to make robust interpretations of the events that constitute foreign policy traditions and dilemmas – thus intimately portraying the role relationship process.

Methodologically, a 'narrative' is a spoken or written text that describes and interprets an event or a series of actions that are connected within some sort of sequence (cf. Czarniawska 2004: 17). However, researchers' interpretations of the events first require them to assemble pieces of evidence to reconstruct the phenomenon to be studied (Wehner and Thies 2014). This is similar to the methods employed by historians, and it allows researchers to create patterns of existing interactions between states in FPA (Thies 2002). In other words, a robust interpretation needs to be preceded by a historical description of the phenomenon in order for it to be recreated and contextualised (Denzin 1990). Whereas actors involved in the interaction tell stories to and about each other, such stories need to be analytically built, assessed and interpreted by the researcher. Thus, this process requires that certain elements be identified so as to detect the relevant narration and it also requires that certain analytical steps be taken.

Analysing narratives involves examining different sources, so as to identify the roles that are expressed within foreign policy traditions and that are embedded within a state's historical repertoire. The reconstruction of ruling narratives entails using secondary sources, official documents and spontaneous press declarations, visual sources as well as interviews in order to identify the characteristics of specific narrations that reveal the roles enacted by states in different settings. This method's consistency is based on the use of different sources for the same events, and on the constant questioning and comparison of the different materials (Wehner and Thies 2014).

It is important to pay particular attention to how the set of ruler narrators rely on states' past events and their own personal stories to confront a foreign policy dilemma, and how such strategic use of the past shapes a role in an emergent present. In addition to relying on historical experiences to make sense of a presenting dilemma, actors also relate to significant others in their external relations so as to comprehend the situation at hand while a role is being cast and performed.

Consequently, the historical events used to justify the selection of one role over another – especially when dilemmas are salient and to be confronted by policy makers from their existing foreign policy tradition – should also be questioned.

The use of interviews can add value to the reconstruction of actors' narrations. One benefit of using these is that a researcher can better grasp how foreign policy makers adapt narrations when dilemmas are being experienced. However, interviews should always be contrasted with written sources.[7] Furthermore, when one wants to capture internal aspects of the foreign policy decision-making process for which there are a lack of supporting written sources then one needs to make sure that these facts are corroborated by other interviews as well. Thus interviews can supplement general governmental documents, and also shed light on the rationale behind declarations that have been made to the media too (Wehner 2015).[8]

Nevertheless the different pieces of evidence gathered do not constitute the full narration as such, rather they are only meaningful individual components of it. These fragments perform narrative functions (cf. Waterhouse-Watson 2013). The partial narrations found in visual sources, written press declarations or official documents can help to determine the characteristics of the role relationships between actors, and thus how salient a particular role is in a given context. Additionally partial narrations can tell us about the reactions of others to another's role, and also about the part that they played in the processes of role conception. Fragments are also able to show the different points of view that the various domestic and international actors have regarding role relationships. Finally, narration fragments also express the specific meanings that actors attribute to the role being played.

For example an actor can enact the revolutionary role as their most salient one, as the case of Venezuela under Hugo Chávez shows. However the revolutionary role can also be supplemented via the performance of auxiliary roles, such as a leadership one within a regional group – like the

Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) that was created by Chávez in 2004. In fact, narrative fragments gathered for Venezuela's case confirm that if one concentrates only on this regional setting and not on the full spectrum of the ruling narrative then leader is the only key role. Whereas the most salient role in ALBA is the leader one, this is enacted to make sense of the revolutionary role as part of the overall foreign policy strategy of Venezuela – following a sort of nexus between master role and auxiliary role (see Thies 2012; Wehner 2015).

Once a role is enacted, its traceability is key to finding variability not only regarding the domestic contestation of a role but also regarding the significant others that may serve as role models (Beneš and Harnisch 2015). Actors do not necessarily become significant others for other actors in the same manner, and they do not always give the same meaning to a role that they share or have in common within their respective role sets. Therefore, at the micro level a change in roles can be analysed by looking at a specific role's key characteristics and meanings according to a particular historical context. Not only is finding the roles in narrations a central aspect of role theory, but so is identifying the key components of specific roles and how such roles have historically evolved too – especially in light of role relationships with others.

This does not mean that roles cannot be changed for other types of role. In fact roles can change, as the case of Venezuela shows, but the enactment of a revolutionary role in terms of its key characteristics in the first decade of the twenty-first century differed from the other revolutionary roles in Latin America that were enacted in the 1960s, such as in Cuba. Even the Cuban case is different today, though, from how the revolutionary role was originally conceived and performed in the past. Nevertheless, political actors unfold ruling narrations that manipulate the past to make sense of the role in question and to sustain it in the present time – as well as to set blueprints for the future.

This is, in fact, the fundamental difference between narratives (and narrations) vis-à-vis historical analysis. From an interpretive narrative analysis perspective, actors advancing ruling narrations have motivational dispositions via roles, as they use their historical repertoire in a rather strategic way to realise a specific interest.

Although narrative analysis relies on fragments to build actors' narrations, it can only make sense when all the evidence gathered is finally put together (Polkinghorne 1998: 36). Actors' ruling narrations describing role relationships can be systematised by drawing on the key components of a ruling story in order to evaluate its plausibility – that is, events, times, actors, locations and points of view (see Bal 1997). These elements can help to assemble the sources, so as to reconstruct a narration and to structure the analysis of a ruling narrative. These elements of interpretive narrative analysis can be used either implicitly or explicitly (while writing the narration), and help researchers to present the stories of foreign policy makers or of a state in a coherent and systematic way – as well as the processes and trajectories of the role relationship in question. Rather than viewing these elements only in a rigid way, they should be used instead as reference points to identify the key ruling narrators of a role or set thereof, the role expectations of others in the process of role conception and change, the reference to the past from an emergent present or how actors confront dilemmas from a tradition, as well as the different locations in which role relationships take place.

Interpretive narrative analysis involves giving a voice to the actors telling the narrations from their own point of view, while also requiring researchers to adopt a particular stance because they are interpreting what ruling actors themselves have already interpreted in their performed role. This is the double hermeneutical dilemma of role theory in its symbolic-interactionist version. Moreover, by putting together the fragments of a narration, the researcher can detect the existing patterns and

intentions of the different role relationships in which an actor participates. Actors are usually unaware of the overall patterns of their interactions, as they are embedded in a contingent context that they often lack perspective on. Despite this, they still refer to historical events to make sense of their present role. Moreover, patterns of behaviour can only be comprehended when the different fragments of evidence are put together in a sort of a web (cf. Thies 2002). In this respect interpretive narrative analysis is similar to the process-tracing approach, and adds more texture to the description of connected events (see Ruback 2010). However, the use of narrative analysis as developed here can also take into account the shortcuts that actors use to ground roles historically. In addition to being able to stand alone as a social science research approach, interpretive narrative analysis can hence also supplement the different methods used to empirically study roles.

Thus, ruling narrations provide political elites with a foundation from which to construct roles in foreign policy from inception to realisation. A narrative becomes, then, a type of organisational scheme expressed in the form of a story (Polkinghorne 1988: 13), one that does not necessarily follow a strict chronological order. In other words, interpretive narrative analysis can make methodological sense of the purposive political act of conceiving of and performing roles in external relations through actors' ruling narrations – wherein goals, interests and behaviour become salient in an emergent present or at the nexus of dilemma–tradition. This purposive political act of casting and performing a role via narrating a story is then reconstructed by the researcher, who identifies the events, times, actors, locations and points of view that constitute and allow the interpretation of a ruling narration – which tells the story of an international actor's role and role relationships with others.

Venezuela's Revolutionary Role

Sketching out the Story: Elements of Narrative Analysis as Yardsticks

The process of rebuilding the ruling narration in the Chávez era in Venezuela has two major **locations**, comprising a domestic and an international dimension. The domestic one deals with the transformation of Venezuela from a democratic state with a market-oriented economic system to one in which a socialist model is being cast (López Maya 2008). It is expected that such domestic change may also trigger shifts in Venezuela's role repertoire and the reference points of its role conception, in terms of role models as significant others. The second location is the international level, in which various 'sub-locations' can also be detected; these can be identified as bilateral, regional and/or multilateral settings. ALBA is an important location for Venezuela's performance of its revolutionary role. To obtain a full picture of the different locations and sub-locations, this element of narrative analysis needs to be linked to the narrative element **actors**.

Actors: the main character of the ruling narration is Hugo Chávez, who was elected in 1998 and died in 2013 (**time**). He has been identified as the most important actor in advancing a socialist model in Venezuela (see Corrales 2009; Ponniah and Eastwood 2011). In other words, Hugo Chávez is the main ruling narrator of the role of revolutionary as well as the narrator of role change away from a traditional role of internationalist and 'critical but reliable' partner of the US in the Latin American region – as some minimum disagreements in this role relationship emerged from time to time (see Corrales and Romero 2015: 157). He also speaks on behalf of Venezuela's state. Yet, all ruling narratives have antagonists that seek to contest the role conception at both the domestic and international levels. Internationally, the same Chávez took up antagonist rhetoric towards actors seen

as obstacles to the development of the revolutionary role such as the US and Colombia – the latter perceived as an ally of the US within the South American region and a potential security threat (Jácome 2006; Trinkunas 2011). Domestically, the main antagonistic actors are the members of the traditional political parties (e.g. COPEI and Alianza Democrática) as well as the economic elites who were displaced from power and lost control over oil revenues. The Federation of Chambers of Commerce in Venezuela (Fedecámaras) was also an antagonistic actor or a role contester vis-à-vis the country's new revolutionary role. As Chávez was a leader who spoke on behalf of the state, and who according to the primary and secondary data tended to speak in the first person, he also personalised his antagonists – for example George W. Bush of the US, Álvaro Uribe of Colombia and Pedro Carmona as the leader of the Fedecámaras (Derham 2010: 259–267).

When Chávez first started to depict Venezuela as a revolutionary and socialist state, there were also positive reactions from other Latin American states and so he used role models. In this sense, a positive significant other for Venezuela's Chávez was Cuba's Fidel Castro; soon the countries were cooperating and had formed an alliance. In fact, Castro and Chávez generated a new regional location for further interactions, such as those within the framework of ALBA, while also upholding their bilateral social interactions outside of the ALBA umbrella too (Romero 2006: 157–160).

To better identify the domestic groups or actors contesting the role of revolutionary, we have to figure out the key events of the narration along with the points in time when they occurred. These key events can be equated with the turning points of a narration. These turning points are also relevant for comprehending the nature of Venezuela's relationships with both negative and positive significant others. **Events** can be recreated in a sequence that needs temporality and spatiality. The latter refers to the different locations that the actions took place in and where the role was performed,

whereas the former refers to the time period or different times of a narration using the emergent present of actors as starting point for the narration. Events are not only part of a location or context, but also of a specific time. A revolutionary role was conceived of and adopted with zeal in the year 2002. Even though Chávez was elected in 1998 and in power from 1999 to 2013, there were certain key events in the making of the revolutionary role. The year 2002 was when the opposition and Fedecámaras tried to overthrow Chávez. In fact, Pedro Carmona – the antagonist – was appointed as interim president and Chávez was even arrested. Days later Chávez was freed and reappointed president however (Derham 2010).

This fact empowered Chávez and gave him more leverage to advance the revolutionary role of Venezuela and changes in its economic pattern. At the same time, this episode was key to selling the ruling narrative to a domestic audience and justifying the new NRC as an antagonist role to the US and Colombia – when before with these two, especially the US, the role relationship was one of partners and friends. In this sense 2004, in terms of time and events, is also an important year, one in which a policy window can be detected. In that year Chávez launched ALBA with Fidel Castro as a strategic move to bring together all states in Latin America that had a left-oriented view, in order to create alliances as well as to disseminate (throughout Latin America) Venezuela's model of socio-economic development (Romero 2006).

Points of view: The ruling narrator in the making of the NRC is Chávez. In addition, the perspective of the opposition and the Fedecámaras are also important to take into consideration if the goal of the researcher is to understand the domestic contestation of roles and to prevent the black boxing of the state. Understanding the views of significant others is also key in order to accurately assess their interactions, and how they unfold in different social settings. Points of view are part of the story told, and as such they are in the ruling narration. For instance, Chávez's point of view or

preference for taking on the revolutionary role for Venezuela is decisive and has to be seen against the backdrop of the events of 2002. Chávez strategically used the attempt to overthrow him as a window of opportunity to advance that revolutionary role both domestically and internationally – the former by isolating the political opposition and the latter by approaching Cuba while simultaneously demonising the US as Venezuela's negative other. Furthermore he portrayed the attempts to overthrow him as similar to what the founding father of Venezuela, Simón Bolívar, had experienced in the past (Derham 2010).

These elements of the narrative analysis are intertwined, as the points of view cannot be comprehended without reference to the relevant time and events – or to the actors casting the ruling narration and the different locations where a social interaction between actors takes place. Although I have presented only an introductory overview here of the ruling narrative, and of how to use the method of interpretive narrative analysis, the purpose of this has been to explicitly show how the narration of Venezuela's role at the domestic and international level can initially be reconstructed by using the aforementioned yardsticks. This is crucial to putting the different dimensions of the ruling narrative together and detecting the key moments in it, wherein old roles are put aside or left behind – and, in parallel, wherewith a new NRC starts to emerge.

The Ruling Narration as a Story

In 2001 Chávez was still following a relatively pro-market and fiscally conservative policy (Hawkins 2010). The role of the state in the economy increased in 2002. One point of national tension was the distribution of oil-production rents. Chávez's government decided to allocate oil revenues to social programmes that were also used to broaden his electoral platform. In fact,

Chávez challenged the existing national tradition over the control of oil production by changing the structure of the local rentier system. This meant that the oil resources were no longer available to the traditional elites, who were consequently displaced from the state's decision-making processes (Derham 2010). This development is key to understanding the increased rivalry between the Chávez government and the country's elites. It should also be noted, however, that the latter's displacement was also pursued through political reform.

From the outset, the Chávez government introduced reforms in the political sphere by: calling for a *constituyente* (an assembly that gathers to write and approve a new constitution); maintaining a distant relationship with the existing political parties; reducing the number of political opponents within public institutions; and, by appointing loyal supporters of the new project to every position within the various state institutions (López Maya 2008: 58–62). These changes were among the underlying causes of the rift that existed between the two groups. They also laid the foundations for the establishment of the revolutionary role at the domestic level, since both political factions' narratives followed a rivalry rationale and thus enhanced the self-conception aspect of the role.

Chávez's economic policy became even more radical after the attempted coup d'état of April 2002 (López Maya 2008). This was a turning point (or passage according to Mead, or a dilemma according to Bevir and others) for the making of a revolutionary role grounded in the political and economic model of (having the option of following) a socialist pattern. It also dismissed the existing role tradition of being a democratic and economically open society, and thus a friend and partner of the US in the Western Hemisphere. Furthermore, the attempt to overthrow Chávez not only helped to cement the revolutionary role but also perpetuated the definitive polarisation of Venezuelan society into those who loved the model and those who

hated it. In many respects, two traditions found themselves continuously confronting each other in the wake of the attempted coup: one advocating the revolutionary role present in the early cultural repertoire of Venezuela's independence and personified in the figure of Simón Bolívar, and the other defending Venezuela's reputation as one of the few long-standing Latin American democracies – even in times when many South American states were controlled by authoritarian governments (1960s–1980s). The taking on of the revolutionary role also enhanced Chávez's need to build alliances at both the regional and international levels. This was because the opposition's official narrative included the story of a possible failure of the Bolivarian project in the near future under Chávez, while the government's narrative claimed that the US was supporting the national elites' contestation of the revolutionary role (República Bolivariana de Venezuela 2001, 2007).

The revolutionary role was not automatically accepted: It was a political phenomenon, and as such it was contested. The government initially positioned the revolutionary role at the national level following Chávez's reappointment two days after the failed coup d'état. Thus the overarching goal that drove Chávez's government was the imposition of a new model: 'socialism of the twenty-first century'. The new model was legitimised because those opposed to Chávez were ideologically fragmented, lacked cohesion and had lost credibility by being involved in the events of 2002. However, the revolutionary role was cast over a period of time through various actions undertaken both domestically and internationally. In this process, both Chávez and the opposition engaged in mutual verbal aggressions that helped to position the revolutionary role of Chávez's faction. Between 2002 and 2008, it was common for members of the opposition to be referred to as 'sons of the Empire', 'puppets of the US', 'aristocrats and

landowners' (meant in a pejorative way) and, above all, *golpistas* (those who took part in the failed coup).

The opposition, on the other hand, referred to Venezuela as 'the new Cuba', led by 'socialists and communists' – which was 'something that should be fought against'. This reflected the meaning and direction of the role prescribed by internal others (see Chávez 2008). A common aspect of the ruling narration of Chávez was using antagonistic simplifications of actors and their interest in order to give coherence to his narration, the us versus them logic outlined earlier. Within this official narration, some of the goals and interests of the government were crucial in providing sense and coherence to the revolutionary role. For instance, the government co-opted strategic national interest groups (e.g. the armed forces) and converted them into supporters so as to prevent new coup attempts (Flemes and Wehner 2015); it also created the means for institutionalising the revolution and keeping it alive in the long term. This latter measure required political reform, and sought to prevent any future attempts to reverse the economic model.

Another aspect of the government's storytelling (mainly from Chávez himself) was the use of 'shortcuts' between relevant Venezuelan historical events in order to connect the role of a revolutionary state and the country's cultural repertoire. Chávez was trying to rhetorically fight the predominant tradition of the state as a democratic and liberal economic one, with the invocation of the revolutionary elements in the nation's history. Thus, Chávez activated an historical tradition to displace the current predominant one. The number of stories that are able to achieve acceptance by the vast majority of citizens is limited. Either such narratives need to be grounded in the national cultural repertoire, or certain parts of the nation need to be able to identify with the new story (see Ringmar 1996). Not only did Chávez's government use the

history of the nation, but he himself also adapted it to his own personal story as leader. Specifically, he used the figure of Simón Bolívar first to justify the change of pattern in the governmental model and then also to solidify it (Hawkins 2010: 57).

In fact, the Republic of Venezuela changed its name to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela under Chávez in 1999. Simón Bolívar, known as 'El Libertador', was the main historical actor in securing Venezuela's independence. He is also seen as the founding father of the free nation and as the chief advocate of a unified Latin America. Chávez also depicted Bolívar as a revolutionary in his time, much the same as himself (see Gobierno Bolivariano 2001: 149, 2002: 8 and 400; see also, Ministerio del Poder Popular del Despacho de la Presidencia 2009: 9–12). However, Chávez was also able to contain alternative interpretations about Bolívar as a promoter of conservative values for a new and independent Venezuelan republic. Chávez contained this alternative interpretation as it could have eroded the forceful association of Bolívar–Chávez as revolutionary symbols of the nation. Thus, in the eyes of Chávez, Venezuela had the cultural repertoire of being a revolutionary state and having revolutionary leaders in the nineteenth century, which he manipulated to displace the existing democratic tradition that predominated in the country during the second half of the twentieth century.

Moreover, the new revolutionary role had credibility among both supporters and contesters, since Chávez also had a personal story of being a revolutionary. Chávez led a failed military coup against the democratic government of President Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992, which resulted in the former being imprisoned for two years – at the end of which time he was eventually pardoned by President Rafael Caldera (1994–1999). Chávez framed his failed action as an attempt to bring social justice to the poor, who had both been forgotten about by the

political system and left out of the model of economic globalisation in place at the time (Wilpert 2007). From 2002, Chávez used his personal story as a rebel to convince both domestic and foreign audiences of the credibility of the revolutionary role for Venezuela.

Thus Chávez adopting the role of revolutionary and imposing a new tradition was radically contested in Venezuela, given the existing antagonism within the political system and within civil society between Chávez's own set of beliefs and those of his opponents. The president's beliefs were shared by similar domestic others, especially among the military and the lower social classes. The key opposition narrators were the political parties of the traditional establishment and the various business associations that believed the country was abandoning its democratic values and its reputation as a model economy. In fact, Carmona became the main antagonist in the story told by Chávez, as he had become interim president during the events of April 2002. Now the storytelling was personalised and simplified for the public in a dyadic form. Once the revolutionary role of Venezuela was accepted by Chávez's supporters and imposed on its opponents after the failed coup, Chávez referred less frequently to Carmona however.

In this first part of the interpretive narrative analysis, the narration of the new role has been reconstructed around the yardsticks presented in the previous section. Actors such as Hugo Chávez, Pedro Carmona and the political opposition are central in the recreation of the events – and the domestic political arena is the main location in which the sequence of events unfold. In fact, Chávez holds the momentum – as it is he who established a diachronic narrative pattern between supporters and *golpistas* opposing a revolutionary role.

There are different times dimensions that interlock in the present (i.e. emergent present) from where the narration is being cast. The failed attempt to overthrow Chávez from power in

2002 becomes a turning point in cementing a revolutionary role; that is, the main event. Although the notions of a revolutionary role were already present in the public discourses collected and published by the presidential office in 1999 and 2000, this idea of a revolutionary role become stronger in the narration advanced by the Bolivarian government after 2002. In fact, the title of the official government compilation of discourses made by Chávez in 2002 is telling: 'The Year of the Anti-Imperialist Resistance' (see Gobierno Bolivariano 2002). The official ruling narration of Chávez highlights certain words that are presented as part of the events, such as 'revolution' and 'socialism of the twenty-first century', as well as the use of the historical past (Bolívar's figure) to justify the new role and set blueprints for a new future. Finally, the narrative analysis adopts the point of view of the leader, as Chávez is the main voice of the narration – while the researcher makes an interpretation from the existing primary and secondary data mentioned.

This domestic dimension of the revolutionary role runs in parallel to state-to-state social interactions that serve to reinforce each other; that is, the international level as a location for the narration. The making of the revolutionary role involved identifying role models of revolution that could offer complementary role relationships, and thus who were sure to be accepted within the particular regional environment – characterised by diverging orientations and beliefs among the different states constituting it.

The NRC of revolutionary at the regional level was conceived of and achieved through the use of Cuba's revolutionary process as a role model. In fact, Cuba's active recognition of Venezuela as a revolutionary state was key to the latter even being able to position this role within the regional system. Furthermore, Cuba's support via role expectations of what Venezuela's role in the region should be also enabled the latter to advance its idea of having a

regional platform to disseminate the benefits of its political project (see Romero 2006: 157–160; ALBA-TPC 2010). This resulted in the launching of ALBA in 2004. The alliance initially consisted of just Cuba and Venezuela, but has since grown to include other states with similar beliefs such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua. These small states also expect that a like-minded state in Latin America more powerful than their own will pursue a similar foreign policy orientation in Latin American affairs, and help to secure tolerance for and acceptance of their own new models from the remaining Latin American states (Flemes and Wehner 2015; Wehner 2015).

Moreover, the attribution of that role to Venezuela by others with different models of development and good foreign policy relations with states like the US has also been key in the sustenance of the revolutionary role. Colombia was seen as a threat to the revolutionary process given the role of the US as a security provider and supporter of that country's fight against drug trafficking, and also because Colombia followed the US in adopting the premises of economic globalisation. Most important, the official recognition by the US ambassador to Venezuela of the new interim government of Pedro Carmona in 2002 also established the parameters of the coming role relationship between the US and Venezuela (Derham 2010).

In fact, by enacting the revolutionary role Chávez confronted the dilemma of breaking with Venezuela's foreign policy tradition of being a democratic country and promoter of democracy, of respecting international law and of being a partner of the US. The latter saw Venezuela as a champion of democracy when most countries in the region were experiencing authoritarianism between the 1960s and 1980s, while at the same time having strong economic ties. The new model of Chávez, his narrative as a revolutionary and the need to create an antagonist role in his story made the US his new enemy despite that country still being the main

destination for Venezuela's oil exports at the time. In other words, a role change from partner of the US to revolutionary took place under the purposeful ruling narrative of Chávez as well as of the rest of the Chavista elite (see Corrales and Romero 2015). One of the most visible references to the US and its president as antagonist characters in the performance of the revolutionary role by Venezuela took place at the UN General Assembly in 2006. Chávez referred to President Bush as the devil. Likewise, Chávez also emphasised the role of the US as a significant negative other in the making of Venezuela's role as a revolutionary:

> As the spokesman for imperialism, he came to give us his recipes for, to try to preserve the current scheme of domination, exploitation and pillage over the peoples of the world […]. They call us extremists, since we demand total freedom in the world, equality among the peoples, and respect for sovereignty of nations. We are rising up against the Empire, against its model of domination […]. Venezuela has joined this struggle and for this reason, we are threatened. The US has already planned, financed and led a *coup* in Venezuela. And the US continues to support coup plotter movements in our country (UN Mission of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela 2006).

Once Venezuela's revolutionary role had been positioned, the government pursued complementary regional ones (such as leader and security provider). The roles of leader and security provider were auxiliary functions that helped to fulfil the regional expectations of others and to make the ALBA project operational. The positioning of the revolutionary role and its auxiliary functions within ALBA were not strongly contested. While Venezuela attributed

the status of role model to Cuba, the new courses of action were, however, to be guided by Venezuela itself. The country positioned itself as a leader within ALBA by using the revenues from its oil resources to secure followership (Corrales 2009). However, this use of positive inducements were part of Chávez's ruling narration technique of invoking once again the figure of Simón Bolívar as the liberator of Latin America from Spanish colonial rule, and his attempts at and belief in creating a unified Latin America. In a way the ALBA project was presented by Chávez as a group making the Bolivarian dream of unity a present reality (see Joint Declaration Governments of Cuba and Venezuela 2004).

Rather than isolating itself from regional affairs, Venezuela tried to share its experience as a revolutionary by establishing a regional platform from which its ideas could be disseminated. By constantly referring to his mission to develop a form of twenty-first century socialism, Chávez was counter-pointing Venezuela's vision of the revolutionary state and the Cuban version of the previous century. This purposeful differentiation between Venezuela and Cuba is indicative of roles that are identical in name, but which have diverse characteristics and are performed differently at the international level according to the historical context of the given role relationships. At the regional level, Venezuela's casting of its own revolutionary role as one that would inform its foreign policy making was a response to the existing dilemma of economic globalisation and the proliferation of free trade agreements promoted by free traders such as the US. In the eyes of Chávez, this eroded the traditional pillars of the Venezuelan state as much as it did those of the other Latin American countries (Wehner 2015). Thus Chávez sought to disseminate the benefits of the new revolutionary tradition – which was grounded in Latin American twentieth-century history – by involving himself in a role relationship with

Cuba and with those Latin American states that had experienced a shift to the left in response to economic globalisation and free-trade policies.

The reconstruction of the narrative of the revolutionary role at the international level as its main location relied on both primary and secondary sources. The recreation of these events involved the use of official documents that contain joint press declarations of leaders such as Chávez and Castro in the constitution of the ALBA project, and Chávez's speeches about Venezuela's foreign policy that are compiled by the presidential office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In addition, the Venezuelan government published an official summary of what ALBA has pursued regionally and how it has helped to consolidate the Bolivarian revolution at home (see ALBA-TPC 2010). Different sources of evidence were assembled and interpreted with the help of the various yardsticks to conduct narrative analysis – actors, locations, times, events and points of view. Chávez is the main protagonist, but he also incorporates the figure of Fidel Castro. Moreover the narration becomes a mixture between personal stories and that of the state of Venezuela and its relationships with Cuba, which is depicted as a friend and role model to follow.

The main location for the narration is a regional audience, meaning Latin America as a regional setting that knows of revolutionary traditions. Further, the regional organisation ALBA was used as location from which to disseminate the benefits of the socialism of the twenty-first century. When Chávez narrated to the rest of Latin America the story of this socialism and of the revolutionary role, especially within ALBA, he told the story using different notions of times from an emergent present. Chávez referred to Bolívar's idea of Latin America as one giant nation. At the same time Chávez also depicted a new future that involves a larger ALBA

with more members, and more states adopting a similar model of development to that of Venezuela.

The events as presented above revolve around the constitution of ALBA and the relationship with the US. The latter is narrated as an antagonistic actor trying to prevent by all means possible the diffusion of the revolutionary model, and thus is depicted as imperialist by Chávez. In this sense, his speech at the UN General Assembly in 2006 was selected as a representative case to show the rhetoric of Chávez towards the US and then President Bush from 2002 (time). This speech also represents what Chávez strived towards for Venezuela internationally, and it also reflects the performance of the new role in front of the entire audience of states that are part of the international system. While Chávez does not talk directly about revolution, he does identify the counter-role of a revolutionary state with the nomenclature of imperialist (in reference to the US). As stressed previously, the figure of the US is key for Venezuela changing its existing foreign policy tradition and role of partner to that country for a new tradition of becoming first and then remaining a revolutionary. This ruling narration also reflects Chávez's points of view from a present time where past and future stories have merged and interlocked with the present story of the revolutionary role.

Conclusion

This article analysed the possibilities of interpretive narrative analysis for the development of role theory in foreign policy analysis. It focused on the ruling narratives of foreign policy elites and leaders as an avenue through which to detect and perform analysis of role conceptions and role changes. However, the theoretical aspect of ruling narratives in the interpretive approach

was also presented due to its importance in developing the methodological component of narrative analysis for role theory. The article has also shown that Mead's temporal notions – past, present, future – are interpretive in nature and similar to those of traditions and dilemmas in the interpretive framework of Bevir and Rhodes. This article established that analysing ruling narratives not only enables researchers to detect the national cultural repertoires used by international actors to conceive of and perform a role, but also reveals the stories that leaders and political elites tell when conceiving a new role – and also when changing an old one via interaction with external significant others.

Interpretive narrative analysis, as presented here, is a method that allow the researcher to capture the making and change of a role within a ruling narrative in a two-dimensional way – that is, domestically and internationally. In fact, actors do not develop roles in a historical vacuum. This is true even when they are confronted with novel foreign policy dilemmas that challenge their foreign policy traditions and, consequently, pose difficult questions on how to proceed in their relationships with general and significant others.

Focusing on the ruling narrations of actors can demonstrate how a role relationship and the meaning of a role vary over time. Actors' narrations allow researchers to uncover the characteristics of a role that has dominated in a particular interaction but whose key internal components have varied, inducing role adaptation and thus change. Actors are able to confront a dilemma that challenges an existing foreign policy tradition by accommodating or changing the tradition; this involves either role adaptation or change but, above all, includes the development and framing of new types of storytelling that need to resonate in the collective memory of the domestic audience. As seen in the case of Venezuela, in order to be accepted new narrations need to be incorporated into the existing cultural traditions of the state – so as to secure the credibility of the new role at both the domestic

and international levels. The Venezuelan example also shows that interpretive narrative analysis can help us to detect the ways in which actors strategically react, use and create their own emergent present by using 'subjective' cultural material of the past to justify a new NRC and to leave aside a previous role tradition.

The case of Venezuela shows that actors were constantly juxtaposing their interpretations of the situation with the expectations of other actors at the national and international levels simultaneously. However once the revolutionary role was positioned and accepted it experienced variations over time. The narration of Venezuela's leader drew upon previous internal revolutionary processes to justify and make sense of the role for the domestic audience. At the same time, the political leaders attributed the US the role of antagonist in the making of the revolutionary one. Significant others are also states that are seen as examples of what an actor does not want to be. The US became a threat and adopted the role of imperialist state in the view of Venezuela's leader. In addition, the ruling narrators also relied on Cuba as a role model – even though that country did not offer a definitive model that Venezuela itself aspired to. Rather, Cuba was a significant other that had actively shaped the conception and performance of the revolutionary role in Latin America. However Chávez differentiated Venezuela's revolutionary role from the ones enacted by others (both past and present), specifically by developing and advancing a narration that depicted the country as a socialist state of the new twenty-first century – that is, emphasising the co-existence of past, present and future within the notion of socialism.

This interpretation of the Venezuelan case would not have been possible without using the different elements offered by interpretive narrative analysis, as the chosen methodology – namely events, times, actors, locations and points of view. These elements were used holistically

to reconstruct actors' ruling narratives for the formation and performance of the revolutionary role under Chávez's mandate.

Thus roles are embedded in ruling narrations. These narrations reflect the expectations of other external actors, as well as the cues of the social system. Venezuela's role as a revolutionary state in the international system was externally attributed to it not only by its role model Cuba but also by those signalling that Venezuela's behaviour fell outside the parameters of the status quo. Venezuela, however, brought its own peculiar twist to the role of the revolutionary state vis-à-vis Cuba, despite the two states having a similar NRC. For instance Cuba opted to take a passive approach in regional affairs even though Chávez was supportive of it playing a more prominent role in Latin American affairs, whereas Venezuela opted to promote the virtues of its model by referring to the Bolivarian ideal of regional unity and by enacting the auxiliary role of leader of ALBA. Herein, its democratic credentials and revolutionary role could not easily be questioned by other regional actors.

Finally, the focus of this article on interpretative narrative analysis can supplement existing research on role theory. For instance, processes of role change advanced by leaders through ruling narrations confirms that such individuals, even those enjoying great latitude to cast a new role, face domestic contestation on what the new role means and imply (role conception), as well as how it is being performed (role play). In addition, the study of ruling narratives and can also provide new insights on how states socialise each other. In the ruling narration of Venezuela one can find social cues from regional and international systems, and the presence of active significant others that would become reference points and socialising agents on how to locate and perform a revolutionary role. Likewise, interpretative narrative analysis as a method can be the means by which to study the stories that different groups of society articulate to either advance or contest a role, as well as the views and

traditions within different governmental offices and ministries when negotiating the meaning and scope of a new role. Finally, interpretive narrative analysis can unveil the different spatial and time dimensions, as well as the set of expectations, embedded in ruling narratives created and recreated in a process of mutual socialisation between states.

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Endnotes

[1] Exceptions are the works of McCourt (2014) and Walker (2017).

[2] This piece does not discuss or analyse the process of democratic erosion in Venezuela.

[3] Only the basic features of interpretive narrative analysis are presented, as the purpose is only to illustrate how to use this method in an introductory way. For a detailed view on interpretive narrative analysis, see, for instance, Bal (1997), Czarniawska (2004), Hajer (2005), Hendriks (2005), Polkinghorne (1998) and Yanow (2000). For a more general introduction to interpretive approaches on research design, see Schawrtz-Shea and Yanow (2012).

[4] The case of Venezuela relies on primary written sources from the Bolivarian government, which summarise the views of Chávez as well as include his different speeches. In addition, this piece relies on different Spanish- and English-language secondary literature sources that focus on Chávez's foreign policy. Interviews are used as background information, and to validate written materials (see Endnote 8).

[5] For a detailed account of the vocabulary of role theory, see Walker (1987), Thies (2010) and Harnisch (2011).

[6] On the difference between identity and roles, see McCourt (2014) and Wehner and Thies 2014.

[7] The author conducted interviews with key actors of the government and legislative body in Venezuela in 2010 for a different research project. The total number of interviews was 30. For this piece, these interviews were used as background information and to compare with written materials. As the written sources do not diverge from the existing documents and speeches, the latter are used here to rebuild Venezuela's ruling narrations drawn on to conceive and cement a revolutionary role.

[8] Depending on the type of research questions, some forms of narrative analysis will prioritise the public discourse and actors' public justifications present in such a narration. In these cases the use of interviews may not be necessary, or they may be only used as background information. However, if the purpose is to study different understandings of a predominant narrative, as well as its contestation and other possible narrations that were dismissed by foreign policy elites, then the use of interviews can be valid in interpretive narrative analysis. On interviews in narrative analysis, see Klotz and Lynch (2015: 48–64); Yanow (2000); Schawrtz-Shea and Yanow (2012).